The Massacre of Children at the Amish Community School and Mahatma Gandhi: The Strength of Forgiveness*

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The horrendous massacre at the Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, on October 2, 2006,[1] is tragically and banefully banal by itself for most Americans and yet what happened here will, probably, sear in American memory for years to come. It is the awe-inspiring response from the Amish parents whose children were murdered and the Amish community that has confounded America and the world.

Charles Carl Roberts IV, a 32-year old local milk-truck driver and "father of three with no criminal record,"[2] stormed into the rural school house carrying a small arsenal[3] on a Monday morning. He then lined up the students, all girls, aged 6 to 13, against the blackboard, tied them together by their feet, and shot five of them in the head. Five other students were seriously hospitalized. Later, he shot himself as police burst into the building.[4] America saw its third deadly school shooting in less than a week. The worst shooting, however, was at the Columbine High School in Colorado in April 1999, where two teenagers killed twelve colleagues and a teacher. This tragic story is now a pedagogic documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), produced by the Academy Award-winning film director Michael Moore.[5]

If what happened at the West Nickel Mines school were just another massacre, then American newspapers would not give it more than a small column, buried deep in the inside pages of its local newspapers. At most there would be an op-ed making the regular plea to United States legislators—most of whom avail, especially in campaign funds, of the largesse of the National Rifle Association (NRA),[6] a powerful lobby devoted to promoting and securing the rights of Americans to carry arms—and arms dealers to tighten access to guns and mandate criminal background checks on gun purchases in America. At the same time the influential NRA would—with charismatic actors from Hollywood, such as, Charlton Heston as its spokesperson

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promote gun ownership rights "freedom in its truest sense"[7]—adeptly and successfully lobby the United States Congress and the media would roll-back and turn a blind eye to, respectively, whatever stricter measures were envisaged.

The story about America and its love with guns has never been scrupulously probed. It is taken for granted that Americans held guns from the latter part of the eighteenth century. Edmund Morgan's review of the controversial book *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*,[8] by Michael A. Bellesiles, a former professor of colonial American history at Emory University, tells us that, "It is a fact that Americans today own more guns per capita than people in other countries. But it is widely imagined, contrary to fact, that they have done so from the beginning, that the people who settled this country did it with a gun ever in hand, to hunt game for food and to protect themselves against the people they dispossessed. It is the purpose of Bellesiles' book to show that the facts are otherwise. That cherished suppositions about guns in early America are demonstrably wrong and were wrong as they came from the mouths of people at the time who should have known better."[9] Morgan continues, "He (Bellesiles) mounts a barrage of evidence to show that guns, except for trade with Indians, were much too scarce in America before the 1840's for many people to have had one. He does not contend that Americans did not have guns, but that they did not have many and did not make much use of them."[10]

If facts carry any weight in this highly emotional debate, Morgan adduces, "At the siege of Louisburg in 1745, the only major military undertaking by any of the colonies on their own, the American commander found that his New Hampshire troops all had to be taught to fire a gun."[11] Or, consider that, "If Americans had been widely equipped with guns, they would have required a substantial number of gunsmiths to make guns and service them. Until the 1840's guns were made, one at a time, by hand."[12] Further, Morgan substantiates, "Before the 1840's Americans were less disorderly than is generally supposed, but when they did resort to violence against one another, they seldom made use of firearms. Before the 1840's riots were not accompanied by gunfire. Vigilante groups 'tended to beat and hang; they rarely shot,' and their victims rarely defended themselves with arms, probably because they did not have them. … Murders were committed with knives, not guns."[13] It is probably not obvious that guns have a lot to do with identity, *not* with security as has often been falsely argued.

Notwithstanding, there is no denying that "there is something about guns that inhibits understanding"[14] and they rarely, if ever, "put an end to argument,"[15] though "they somehow generate beliefs that are obviously contrary to observable fact."[16] What did Roberts achieve by murdering the Amish children? How did he seek conciliation for an allegedly "overwhelming guilt from molesting relatives in his youth, as police suggest"?[17] How is it that "Roberts came to view little girls as a painful reminder of loosing his own"?[18] The killer's wife, Marie, is reported to have said that, "He [Roberts] was also traumatized by the loss of an infant daughter named Elise, who lived for just 20 minutes after she was born prematurely in 1997."[19] How do these supposed motives of the murderer pare with the bare fact that "at least one of the attacker's own three living children *is* [italics mine] a daughter."[20] As Dr. Phillip Resnick, a psychiatrist at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, has

laconically described, "the official explanation"—an act of overwhelming guilt—in the Amish massacre "just doesn't add up."[21]

What is, nevertheless, also *very* different is that the West Nickel Mines school is Amish. This has made all the difference in explaining why this massacre has gripped America's conscience, made international headlines, attracted the world media, and reported in-depth for more than a week in leading U.S. newspapers and television.

Who are the Amish and what is so distinctive about them? The Amish, also known as Anabaptists, are a Christian denomination, though separate from mainstream Christians in many ways. "The Amish church grew out of the Anabaptist movement [in] sixteenth century Europe."[22] The are known as Anabaptists, meaning "rebaptizers" because they "discard[ed] the rituals of infant baptism and the Mass … [consequently] broke with both the Catholic and Protestant thought … established a church based on voluntary choice, whose members were accountable to one another and were expected to live apart from the worldly society. Many Anabaptists emphasized the importance of emulating the teachings of Jesus in their daily lives and thus rejected all violence, including military participation."[23] Today, the Amish follow the teachings of the charismatic Mennonite leader Jakob Ammann (1693–1730?) for whom the Amish are named. These teachings and practices are embodied in the "*Ordunung* [whose] understandings include general principles such as modesty and nonresistance to violence, as well as specific applications, such as prohibiting television and wearing prescribed clothing. Generally unwritten and passed on by oral tradition, the *Ordunung* is a body of communal understandings that cultivates group identity, cohesion, and order. The *Ordunung* articulates the moral order of the community, and its practices define the very essence of Amish identity."[24] In addition, the Amish do not draw federal retirement benefits or accept any other forms of government assistance. They hold fast to an eighteenth century lifestyle which makes them renounce modern amenities, such as, electricity, plumbing, automobiles, radio, music, video games, and mobile phones. They live mostly by crop and dairy farming. Their life is exemplified by piety and simplicity. The media and Hollywood, in the film *Witness* (1985), have caricatured the Amish by their "horse drawn buggies, women wearing long dresses with aprons in white or black and cloth cap or bonnet, and men dressed in dark pants or suspenders and vest, with a broad-rimmed hat."[25] They thus flimsily portray the Amish as idealistic, quaint, and almost Luddite. In fact, the Amish, as writes Professor Donald Kraybill of Elizabethtown College and author of many books on Amish life, are modern in many ways, though not in the manner in which "modernity" is commonly understood. Kraybill informs us that, "if, being modern means controlling the conditions of one's work, if it means a delight in artisanship, if it means protecting the individual from the burden of choice, if it means taming the detrimental effects of technology, if it means safeguarding community identity, if it means caring for the unfortunate and the elderly, if it means guaranteeing the individual a secure identity, and it if means bestowing meaning to all of life, then perhaps the Amish have not only joined the modern world but are leading it."[26]

What is distinct about the Amish is their belief known as "a path that has heart."[27] Sue Bender, who lived in an Amish community in Brimfield, Iowa, in mid-1982,[28] has

written her experiences in a remarkable book, *Plain and Simple: A Woman's Journey to the Amish*, which may give us some valuable insights. As the phrase "a path that has heart" has an enigmatic tone notwithstanding its simple evocativeness, I have quoted extensively a few examples, in different settings, which may guide us to reflect on its varied meanings. Bender narrates,

> I had been afraid to tell friends what touched me most deeply, because it might sound simplistic, corny, banal. On one of those days when I was feeling particularly miserable, a [Amish] friend told me about her six-year-old grandson who was helping his father puzzle out how to mend a broken lamp while his grandfather looked on.
> 'Do you know how talented your father is at fixing things?' the proud grandfather asked.
> 'Yes,' the boy said with a serious expression on his face, 'but do you know what he's really best at?'
> 'What?' the surprised grandfather asked.
> '*He's best at loving*' [italics mine].
>
> Is loving banal?
> I went back to the dictionary and looked up banal [sic] The first definitions were 'trite' and 'insipid' I knew that. But then I read out and found 'commonness.' Maybe the things we share in common are the most important things.
>
> Is loving simple?
> *Listening to your heart is not simple* [sic]. Finding out who you are is not simple. It takes a lot of hard work and courage to get to know who you are and what you want.[29)]

The Amish still live, for the most part, by the fruit of their labor from the land which gives them a particular worldview "that has been cultivated and reinforced by an agrarian tradition."[30)] This in turn gives them a certain sense of rhythm and doing. Bender who witnessed an agricultural activity describes another aspect of the "path that has heart." Bender writes,

> Most Amish farmers own less than one hundred acres, keeping their farms small so horses can be used instead of tractors and neighbors can pitch in with the chores. In this way the community remains an intimate, manageable size. 'Brotherly love' becomes an economic asset.
>
> Their intention is to make things grow and do work that is useful. I couldn't say exactly what the difference is, but I felt a difference. *They work to work* [italics mine]. Their work time isn't spent 'in order to do something else'—to have free time on weekends, go to a restaurant, or save for a vacation or retirement. *They do not expect to find satisfaction in that vague 'something out there' but in the daily mastery of whatever they are doing* [italics mine].

> The Amish strive to create an ecology of no waste; the land supplies the food for the family and the animals, and the family and the animals do the work. 'Manure is our crucial crop,' Eli joked. 'Tractors don't make manure!' A horse reproduces itself, he explained, and tractor only makes debts.[31)]

The Amish who live off the land are very careful with the produce that they harvest and as such they preserve food for the winter. This enhances their values of self-dependence, respect for God's bounty, providing for the entire community, and keeps them from buying food from the "English" (the term used by the Amish to refer to outsiders) in the market at higher prices and probably of lower quality. Also, since they do not have electricity, which effectively means no freezers, there is a lot of pickling to be done to preserve food. Bender shares her experience participating in one such activity:

> In the basement I saw cabinets filled with tomato relish, three kinds of bean salad, and cole slaw. Quantities were impressive—forty-six quarts of applesauce, ninety pounds of chicken, and forty of hamburger. Seeing my astonishment, Lydia added, 'Last week we were very busy canning sixty-four jars of tomatoes. We made at least four bushels of them ready for ketchup. …
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> 'The less we have to buy at the market, the better,' Emma added.
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> That day we sterilized large glass jars, boiled the peas, and canned them, working steadily, chatting as we went along at and even rhythm, allowing the work to get done, task by task, an unfolding process. I watched each of them—marveling at their ability to be relaxed as they worked and to stay focused on one thing at a time. When we finished, we had forty jars of peas, each labeled and dated, to place in neat rows in the cellar.
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> *No one rushed* [italics mine].
>
> *Each step was taken with care* [italics mine].
>
> The women moved through the day unhurried. There was no rushing to finish so they could get on to the 'important things'. *For them, it was all important* [italics mine].[32)]

The "path that has heart" also champions forgiveness, as forgiveness "is woven into the fabric of Amish faith"[33)] with historical roots in the Anabaptist martyrs who "yield[ed] their life completely to God. … Songs by imprisoned Anabaptists, recorded in the *Ausbund*, the Amish hymn book, are regularly used in Amish church services today. The 1,200 page *Martyrs Mirror*, first printed in 1660, which tells the martyr stories, is found in many Amish houses and is cited by preachers in their sermons. The martyr voice still rings loudly in Amish ears with the message of forgiveness of those who tortured them and burned their bodies at the stake."[34)]

Hence, speechless as it would leave us, it was that before "blood was hardly dry on the bare, board floor of the Nickel Mines school … the Amish parents (of the massacred children) sent words of forgiveness to the family of the killer who had executed their children. It was just the natural thing to do, the Amish way of doing things."[35] This is what has stunned not only America but the world, especially at a time when hate, revenge, vengeance, violence, and sheer malice against one another using the pretext of religion reverberate and fill our newspapers. Here is another way: a refusal to meet violence with violence, but to greet violence with forgiveness.

How can one forgive a heinous crime of one's own kith and kin? Can this really be true? Yes, *in deed*, and there is much more to this notable, religious act practiced so ingenuously, insistently, and intentionally by the Amish community. In fact, two of the survivors of the shooting told their parents that, "13-year-old Marian Fisher, one of the slain girls, apparently hoping the younger girls would be let go (said to the killer) 'shoot me and leave the other ones loose,'"[36] according to Leroy Zook, an Amish dairy farmer. It was Leroy's daughter, Emma Zae Zook, "the teacher who ran from the schoolhouse to a farm to summon police."[37] It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that Amish children are reared to be fearless in the face of death or that the sting of death has left no pain for the Amish parents and community. There can be no doubt that "Death is painful. Many tears are shed. The pain is sharp, searing the hearts of Amish mothers and fathers as it would those of any other parents."[38] Should there yet be some doubt that the Amish might bear at "least some grudges—[which] are justifiable in the face of such slaughter,"[39] Bender who lived among the Amish for a while provides some deeper insight into how the Amish understand the value of prayer. Bender writes, "Five minutes in the early morning and five minutes in the evening were devoted to prayer. *The rest of the day was spent living their beliefs* [italics mine]. Their life was all one piece. *It was all sacred—and all ordinary* [italics mine]."[40] On another level, in the midst of awful pain, the Amish draw up on the values of *Gelassenheit* and respond with the strength to forgive.

Gelassenheit means "submission—yielding to a higher authority."[41] It embodies specific meanings, such as, "self-surrender, resignation to God's will, yielding to God and others, willingness to suffer, self-denial, contentment and a calm spirit."[42] However, the Amish do not use the word *Gelassenheit* to describe their behavior. It is the practice—"obedience, humility, submission, simplicity, and plainness"[43]—which conveys the essence of the term. All these are values which stand in complete contrast to the world where indiscipline, pride, dominance, and pretence hold sway. For the Amish it is in community that *Gelassenheit* is nurtured, unfolds itself, and is rewarded. "The practice of *Gelassenheit* entails a modest way of waking, talking, and dressing. *Gelassenheit* brings self-effacing comments and waits for others to go first. It forbids force and thus prohibits members of the church from joining the military, holding political office, or filing lawsuits. The lowly spirit of *Gelassenheit* uses silence and avoidance to deal with conflict, denies ostentatious display… The graces of *Gelassenheit* place the welfare of the community and respect for its traditions above the whims of individual preference."[44] The values of *Gelassenheit* shape the identity of an Amish person and give it its distinctive characteristics which sharply stand apart from those of the world and for which the world paradoxically yearns. In fact, Amish

towns and farms have become "tourist havens" for many Americans and international visitors who "search for rest and a touch of Amish culture."[45] What the Amish are teaching us is similar to the ideas expressed by Thomas Merton (1915–1968), a Trappist monk, author, and activist. Merton wrote in *Contemplation in a World of Action*, "[The Amish are a community which] at once loves the world, yet stands apart from it with a critical objectivity which refuses to become involved in its transient fashions and its more manifest absurdities."[46]

The Amish have stood apart from the world around them and probably rightly so; it is the questions of identity, values, and community which divide the Amish from others. The Amish have provided positive, realistic, and meaningful answers to the problems which plague society, of which violence is an intricate part, through their lives in community; though not without paying a price. The price is intentionally separating themselves from that part of the world which they choose to, while yet remaining in it. To the Amish, Kraybill explains, "the term *world* [sic] refers not to the globe, but to the entire social system outside the Amish society—its people, values, vices, and institutions—in short, to modernity itself."[47] One may well ask, why do the Amish divide themselves "our people" from "outsiders" and how do they live in the world? In fact, the Amish live apart from the "English" and exercise restrain in contact with them. The answer partly lies in "the core of Amish culture [which] is embedded in *Gelassenheit*,"[48] the Amish system of education, and the continuous self-restraint and discipline in relations with the "English" and in enterprise.

And yet, what is so amazing is that the Amish, Kraybill writes, "are better equipped to process grief than are many other Americans. Their faith sees even tragic events under the canopy of divine providence, having a higher purpose or meaning hidden from human sight at first glance. The Amish don't argue with God. They have an enormous capacity to absorb adversity—a willingness to yield to divine providence in the face of hostility. Such religious resolve enables them to move forward without the endless paralysis of analysis that asks why, letting the analysis rest in the hands of God."[49] The Amish by their simple practice of forgiveness have made us reflect that all religions at their heart have the seminal roots of mercy, forgiveness, love, nonviolence, and compassion.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the nonviolent architect and activist of India's struggle for freedom and who believed that "all religions are true,"[50] practiced, preached, and gave public witness to a philosophy similar to that of the Amish—"forgive and forget."[51] Gandhi, however, unlike the Amish who whose lives are a witness to what their tortured ancestors experienced and what their teachings call for, did not speak about forgiveness until he had experienced brutal, physical violence. It was in South Africa, where Gandhi lived from 1893–1914, that he first experienced physical violence. The following three instances may illustrate Gandhi's response and what set him thinking about the need to endure suffering without retaliation or taking recourse to the law, despite being a lawyer. First, in June 1893, Gandhi was thrown out of train to Pretoria, as he was in a compartment where only white persons could travel and holding a first-class ticket was held against him.[52] Second, in July 1893, Gandhi was kicked off the footpath as he was walking near President Kruger's home.[53] Third, in January 1897, on arrival in Durban from India, Gandhi was attacked by a

mob.[54] In each of these instances, Gandhi suffered physically from the violence inflicted without any reason, except that he was a person of color. Racism and apartheid in South Africa at this time were virulent forces which not only affected Indians, but thousands of laborers from various parts of the British Empire. They had to confront all sorts of humiliations, let alone violence from white persons (Boers and British), on a daily basis and yet respond with dignity. Though, Gandhi's response was not only one of complete refusal to sue his assailants but also of forgiveness, similar to that of the Amish, yet Gandhi did not stop thinking about the motivation of his white brothers and sisters and how the colored community could respond with a much more potent nonviolent weapon to bring about a "paradigmatic shift."[55] It was through this process of thinking deeply about the motivation of the colonial system to commit violence against the colonized not only at the physical level, but also in terms of plundering the economic and social wealth of the colony,[56] that Gandhi worked out a philosophy of *satyagraha* (resistance rooted in love and nonviolence).[57] Initially, though, Gandhi conceived *satyagraha* as a path (*marg*) to nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and civil resistance against blatant abuses of human rights of indentured laborers in South Africa.

It was only gradually after fervent appeals, petitions, mass demonstrations, arrests, dialogue, and delegations to Britain, pleading with it to treat all members of the Empire resident in the colony of South Africa as citizens, had failed that Gandhi enlarged, through interaction between principle and practice, the concept of *satyagraha* to include: "a commitment to upholding the truth (*satya*), demanding absolute nonviolence (*ahimsa*) from the proponent of *satyagraha*, a reasoned and willing obedience to the laws of the State, a capacity and willingness to suffer, complete discipline, unobtrusive humility, and utter selflessness."[58]

On his return to India in 1915 and in the course of the Indian struggle for freedom, Gandhi articulated at greater length about the concept of self-suffering (*tapas*) which is an intricate part of the act of forgiveness. As Raghavan Iyer, a perceptive Gandhian philosopher, writes, "*Tapas* means that which burns up impurities, purificatory action, austerities, penance. The original meaning of the word *tapas* denotes warmth or heat."[59] From a Gandhian point of view the need for self-suffering on the part of a *satyagrahi* was essential because it was an integral part of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and the need to convert the opponent. This need to convert the opponent and bring about a paradigmatic shift or radical conversion grew out of Gandhi's practical conviction that it is futile to appeal to the mind of an unjust person, colonialist, murderer, or tyrant. The human heart is where Gandhi finally waged the most exacting of all his battles. Gandhi did this as it was his resolute belief that fundamental changes in society could only occur through conversion of people's hearts. He knew the limits of reason, especially with regard to nonviolence. Writing in *Young India,* November 5, 1931, Gandhi explained,

> It came to me that we should refuse to obey legislation that was degrading and let them put us in jail if they liked. Thus came into being the moral equivalent of war. …Since then the conviction has been growing upon me, that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone but

> have to be purchased with their suffering. Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason… The appeal of reason is more to the head but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. *Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword* [italics mine].[60]

The self-suffering (*tapas*) of the bereaved Amish parents and the Amish community has opened the eyes, hearts, minds, and even the purses of people the world over. So far, donations have topped three million dollars for Amish shooting victims,[61] according to an *Associated Press* report of November 20, 2006, from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This concern has even reached the White House and though some may cynically dismiss as political rhetoric the statement by the White House spokeswoman, "It breaks America's collective heart when innocent children who are at school to learn are violently taken hostage and shot down in their schools," yet the many who aren't politically naive do know that such concern is never futile.[62] The immediate result has been a public statement by a clinical psychologist, Nadine Kaslow, a professor at the Emory School of Medicine in Atlanta. Kaslow put her finger right on the problem affecting American schools when she remarked that, "Violence in U.S. schools was a bigger problem than reported. … Shootings were just an extreme form of that violence."[63] In other words, people are becoming conscious that it isn't only guns, but violence which is endemic in American society that needs to be probed at its very roots and solutions assiduously sought. Just imagine what would have been the effect on the average American about the massacre at the Amish school if the United States "wasn't one of the most violent, belligerent, (and) revengeful Government in the contemporary world and right under [whose] nose the Amish community continues to live"[64] and if the United States took effective steps to solve domestic and international conflicts nonviolently. According to reliable sources, civilians killed in Iraq, as a consequence of U.S. military intervention, are estimated at 47,781 at a minimum.[65] Little wonder that Kaslow comments that, "We (Americans) get the message that the way to communicate is through violence and that somehow violence is acceptable."[66] And, yet, in the very midst of the senseless violence perpetrated by the United States government abroad and total lack of effective gun control at home, there stands the shining example of Amish forgiveness and an implicit, clarion call for nonviolence. A redeeming paradox or is it amazing grace?

Diana Butler Bass, an American and mother of an 8-year old girl, challenges us to keep on the track of this redeeming paradox by posing the not so absurd question: "What if the Amish were in charge of the war on terror?"[67] I quote below at length her proposal as it demands the very strength to forgive which we have learnt from the Amish and which challenges us to adopt it in the political sphere. Bass writes,

> As my husband and I talked about the spiritual power of these actions, I commented in an offhanded way, 'It is an amazing witness to the peace

> tradition.' He looked at me and said passionately, 'Witness? I don't think so. This went well past witnessing. They weren't witnessing to anything. *They were actively making peace.*'
>
> Then an odd thought occurred to me: What if the Amish were in charge of the war on terror? *What if, on the evening of Sept. 12, 2001, we had gone to Osama bin Laden's house* (metaphorically, of course, since we didn't know where he lived!) *and offered him forgiveness? What if we had invited the families of the hijackers to the funerals of the victims of 9/11? What if a portion of The September 11th Fund had been dedicated to relieving poverty in a Muslim country? What if we dignified the burial of their dead by our respectful grief?*
>
> *What if, instead of seeking vengeance, we had stood together in human pain, looking honestly at the shared sin and sadness we suffered? What if we had tried to make peace?*
>
> So, here's my modest proposal. We're five years too late for an Amish response to 9/11. But maybe we should ask them to take over the Department of Homeland Security. *After all, actively practicing forgiveness and making peace are the only real alternatives to perpetual fear and a multi-generational global religious war.*
>
> *I can't imagine any other path to true security.* And nobody else can figure out what to do to end this insane war. Why not try the Christian practice of forgiveness? *If it worked in Lancaster, maybe it will work in Baghdad, too.*[68] [All italics mine]

If we calmly reflect we may well agree with Bass and conclude that this is the *only* alternative in Iraq. It takes bold faith to liberate ourselves from the incessant killing of innocent civilians in Iraq, get out of the spiral of violence, automaton retaliation, and to bring about a radical transformation. An "eye for an eye"[69] will make the whole world blind, that is certainly *not* the way of Amish or Gandhi, but that is precisely the road where the United States' political leaders are taking Americans in Iraq—"*provoking more conflict than it is preventing* [italics mine]."[70] In fact, John Brady Kiesling, a career United States foreign service officer "for nineteen years … with wide experience in the Near East … resigned publicly—with a strong letter explaining his decision to Colin Powell—when he became convinced that the Bush administration was determined to invade Iraq."[71] Kiesling writes, "Successful counterterrorism requires respect for the lives of innocents. Iraqis, for instance, see dozens of their fellow citizens again and again being sacrificed in American bombing attacks that often are not successful against terrorists in any case. Yet their dismay and anger are not understood."[72] Max Rodenbeck, the Mideast Correspondent for *The Economist*, writing in a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books*, tells us that,

> Increasingly, however, the narrative of a great crusade to rid the world of terrorism (the current label used by the White House is 'The Long War'), with Iraq is an exemplary episode, is *no longer convincing to Americans*, as the opinion polls suggest. In August CBS polls found that 81 percent of Americans accept

> the threat of terrorism as something 'they will always have to live with.' More than half, according to a Harris poll *do not believe that the fighting Iraq is part of Bush's campaign against terrorism*, and 57 per cent *do not believe that America's safety from terrorism depends on its outcome.* In fact, some 63 per cent now say that Iraq was '*not worth it*,' compared to 48 percent last year. A majority also think the *conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are creating more terrorists than they are eliminating* [All italics mine]. And this year, for the first time since September 11, a solid majority reckoned a terrorist attack in the United States within coming weeks was 'unlikely.'[73]

This provides more rationale for urgently considering Bass's deeply redemptive, boldly unorthodox, and plainly humanitarian challenge to all of us for radical transformation? Can we pick up the proverbial gauntlet and extend our hands in *active peace*?

The concept of *tapas* for Gandhi was closely related to the doctrine of *moksha* (liberation, salvation, redemption). Iyer comments that "*Moksha* for Gandhi signified the vision of Absolute Truth, to be attained by means of *tapas* or self-suffering, and the relation between *moksha* and *tapas* was mirrored in the relation between *satya* and *ahimsa*."[74] A single, historical example from Gandhi's illustrious life may illumine this double relationship. During the partition of India, into Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India, in 1947 Gandhi toured and lived in the villages of then Bengal (now Bangladesh) bringing the message to both Muslims and Hindus of communal harmony, peace, nonviolence, and a call to love. He did this knowing fully well that he may possibly be killed. Gandhi was armed: not only with a wooden staff, but an undaunted faith in the ability of human beings to "forgive and forget." The last Viceroy of India, Louis Mountbatten, a distinguished war hero, wired to Gandhi on August 26, 1947, "My Dear Gandhiji, in the Punjab we have 55 thousand soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man and there is no rioting. As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the One Man Boundary Force."[75] For Gandhi as for the Amish children, their parents and the community, death did not pose any sting. To that end, for Gandhi death was *moksha* (liberation) and he invited self-suffering (*tapas*) by walking unarmed in its very midst. The truth (*satya*) was that he would prove to the very end that nonviolence (*ahimsa*) was the only way for Hindus and Muslims to live together in peace, despite the harrowing pain of death and suffering of thousands of innocents. Marian Fisher, the slain 13-year old Amish girl, exemplified this raw courage of inviting self-suffering ("shoot me"). Fisher's truth (*satya*) was that through her death she was simultaneously showing her love (*satyagraha*-resistance rooted in love for the opponent) for Roberts and her dear colleagues, while also literally liberating (*moksha*) others—"leave the other ones loose"—and calling for nonviolence (*ahimsa*) against the other girls. A greater example of a present day Gandhian, in one so young, is yet unknown.

The forgiveness which the Amish have practiced both at the individual and community level, Kraybill writes, "springs from the example of Jesus, the cornerstone of Amish faith… The Amish take the life and teachings of Jesus seriously. Without

formal creeds, their simple (but not simplistic) faith accents living the way of Jesus rather than comprehending the complexities of religious doctrine… Beyond his example, the Amish try to practice Jesus' admonitions to turn the other cheek, to love one's enemies, to forgive 70 times seven, and to leave vengeance to the Lord. Retaliation and revenge are not part of their vocabulary."[76] That is why at the burial of Charles Carl Roberts IV on Saturday, October 7, just a few miles from the one-room school house he stormed on Monday, "about half of perhaps 75 mourners on hand were Amish."[77] Rev. Bruce Porter, a fire department chaplain from distant Morrison, Colorado, who was present said, "It's the love, the forgiveness, the heartfelt forgiveness they (the Amish) have towards the family. I broke down and cried seeing it displayed."[78]

If going the proverbial extra mile were necessary, the widow Marie, of Charles Carl Roberts IV, and their three small children have been invited to join the Amish community and will be accepted. Further, "the Nickel Mines Accountability committee, which is coordinating receipt and distribution of donations from the sum of $3.2 million donated to help the [Amish] survivors, … [has] been in contact with Marie, 'to make sure adequate support is available for her and their three children.'"[79] And so, as we stand in utter awe of the Amish Community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, for reminding us in the face of such tremendous pain and grief of the strength of forgiveness, the Amish ask us: "Is it not valuable in the midst of a violent world to create a society where harmony, gentleness, and quiet discipline are the norm rather than hostility?"[80]

Notes

1) "Execution-style shooting shatters Amish way of life," *The Japan Times*, October 4, 2006, 7.
2) "Gunman wrote he was 'angry with life, God,'" *The Japan Times*, October 4, 2006, 7.
3) The arsenal included "a 9-millimeter semiautomatic pistol, two shotguns, a stun gun, two knives, two cans of gunpowder and 600 rounds of ammunition." See David Kocieniewski and Gary Gately, "Man Shoots 11, Killing 5 Girls, in Amish School," *The New York Times*, October 3, 2006 (http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/03/us/03amish.html?ex=1317528000&en=a05a29829dffb56&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss). Together with the arsenal, "Robert took wood, latches, flex cuffs and a common sex lubricant … indicating intent to restrain and molest the schoolgirls before killing them, [State Police Commissioner, Jeffrey B.] Miller said." See "Killer's sordid plan sharpens Amish anguish," *The Japan Times*, October 5, 2006, 6.
4) Roberts in his suicide letters to his children "alluded to resentment over a past grievance." The State Police Commissioner, Jeffrey B. Miller, "speculated that it could have something to do with a child that Roberts and his wife lost years ago." However, Miller said, "The notes expressed rage: 'He was angry with life. Angry with God.'" See "Gunman wrote," he was 'angry with life, God,'" *The Japan Times*, October 4, 2006, 7.
5) Geoffrey O'Brien in his review of Michael Moore's documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) writes, "What makes it (Moore's documentaries) all the more persuasive is that, at every step, he reminds you in devastating detail how ineptly or deceptively others have told their versions of this same story. The proof of their ineptitude or deception is that he's telling things you haven't heard before, and showing you pictures that seem to speak for themselves. It's not a story about a well-hidden conspiracy: all you have to do, he implies, is look around." See O'Brien, "Is It All Just a Dream," *The New York Review of Books* (13) August 12, 2004 (http://www.ybooks.com/articles/17315).
6) The NRA is ranked first "in the National Journal's 2005 listing of Washington's most powerful lobbies," in Michael Massing, "The Storm over the Israel Lobby," *The New York Review of Books* (10) June 8, 2006 (http://www.nybooks.com/articles/19062). For details about the NRA see the article in

Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Rifle_Association).

7) See Wikipedia, "Charlton Heston" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlton_Heston). Heston was "president [of the NRA] and spokesman from 1998 until his resignation in 2003. As NRA president he is perhaps best known, while raising an antique Sharps Rifle over his head at the 2000 NRA convention, for saying that presidential candidate Al Gore would take away his Second Amendment rights 'from my cold, dead hands.'"
8) Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2000).
9) Edmund S. Morgan, "In Love with Guns," review of Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*, in *The New York Review of Books* (16) October 19, 2000, 30.
10) Ibid., 30.
11) Ibid., 30.
12) Ibid., 30.
13) Ibid., 31.
14) Ibid., 30.
15) Ibid., 30.
16) Ibid., 30.
17) "Girls' murder motive puzzles experts," *The Japan Times*, October 5, 2006, 6.
18) Ibid., 6.
19) "Killer's sordid plan …," op. cit., 6.
20) "Girls' murder …," op. cit., 6.
21) Ibid., 6.
22) Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.
23) Ibid., 6.
24) Ibid., 12.
25) "Execution-style … Amish way of life," op. cit., 7.
26) Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, revised edition, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 321–322.
27) Sue Bender, *Plain and Simple: A Woman's Journey to the Amish*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 131.
28) Ibid., 35.
29) Ibid., 129–130.
30) Kraybill and Nolt, *Amish Enterprise*, 14.
31) Bender, *Plain and Simple*, 64.
32) Ibid., 47–48.
33) Donald B. Kraybill, "Forgiving is woven into the life of the Amish," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 October 2006, (http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/15698632.htm).
34) Ibid.
35) Ibid.
36) "Amish girl, 13, asked to be shot first, to let younger victims go," *The Japan Times*, October 8, 2006, 6.
37) Ibid., 6.
38) Kraybill, "Forgiving is woven …," op. cit.
39) Ibid.
40) Bender, *Plain and Simple*, 51.
41) Kraybill and Nolt, *Amish Enterprise*, 13.
42) Ibid.
43) Ibid.
44) Ibid., 14.
45) Ibid., 223.
46) Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1973), 58.
47) Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, 44.
48) Kraybill and Nolt, *Amish Enterprise*, 13.
49) Kraybill, "Forgiving is woven …," op. cit.
50) M. K. Gandhi, *All Religions are True*, ed. Anand T. Hingorani, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,

1962).

51) Kraybill, "Forgiving is woven …," op. cit.
52) M. K. Gandhi, "On the way to Pretoria," in *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. from the original in Gujarati by Mahadev Desai, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 111–112.
53) M. K. Gandhi, "What it is to be a 'coolie,'" in *An Autobiography*, 130.
54) Gandhi, "The Test," in *An Autobiography*, 192.
55) Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 78.
56) M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1989), 35–54.
57) See Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 3, *Non-violent Resistance and Social Transformation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 18–87.
58) Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, (London: Concord Grove Press, 1983), 297.
59) Ibid., 235.
60) Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, 78.
61) "Donations Tops 3-Million for Amish Shooting Victims," *Associated Press*, November 20, 2006, (http://abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?section=local&id=4780796).
62) "U.S. school shootings raise questions about causes," *The Japan Times*, October 4, 2006, 7.
63) Ibid.
64) I am grateful to Prof. R. Govinda, e-communication of November 5, 2006, for sharing this insightful comment on the synopsis of my talk delivered to the Unitarian Fellowship, International House, Tokyo, November 12, 2006.
65) See web site "Iraq Body Count," (http://www.iraqbodycount.org/#position).
66) "U.S. school shootings," op. cit.
67) Diana Butler Bass, "What if the Amish were in charge of the war on terror?" October 11, 2006, (http://www.ecapc.org/articles/article-11282.htm).
68) Ibid.
69) This proverb "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is originally from the Code of Hammurabi. Hammurabi was a King of Babylon (1792–1750 BC). It is used in the Bible, Matthew 5:38, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_eye_for_an_eye). Gandhi used it in his writings and speeches.
70) Max Rodenbeck, "How Terrible Is It?" *The New York Review of Books* (19), November 30, 2006, 35. Rodenbeck writes, "During the seven months between September 2003 and April 2004 … the proportion of Iraqis saying that attacks on foreign troops were somewhat or fully justified leapt from 8 percent to 61 percent. This was exactly the period when a sudden surge in attacks on U.S. forces, following the initial post-invasion clam, prompted vigorous counterinsurgency measures. That is all the time it took, it seems, for Iraqis to decide they did not like being searched, beaten up, shot at, jailed, and humiliated by American troops, whatever the reasons given. Recent polls shows some 61 percent of Iraqis still approve of attacking Americans, and 78 percent believe the US presence is 'provoking more conflict than it is preventing.'"
71) Stanley Hoffmann, "The Foreign Policy the US Needs," *The New York Review of Books* (13), August 10, 2006, 62.
72) Ibid., 62.
73) Rodenbeck, "How Terrible Is It?" 34.
74) Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, 237.
75) Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. 2, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1956–1958), 382; quoted in B. R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).
76) Kraybill, "Forgiving is woven …," op. cit.
77) "Amish children buried," NDTV.com, (http://www.ndt.com/morenews/showmorestory.asp?slug=Amish+children+buried&id=94446).
78) Ibid.
79) "Donations Tops …," op. cit.
80) Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, 327.